



Building a WGU Enrollment Community

Brian Tillman
Dawna Kelley
Jonathan Huck

 InScribe

+

wgu  labs

Project Summary

Enrolling in higher education can be a stressful experience. This is especially true for online students, whose entire decision process often takes place through their computers. Navigating the application, learning about the culture of the institution, and figuring out how to balance life, work, and school — prospective students rely on timely support and authentic feedback to help them move through the application process and gain confidence in their enrollment decision.

To enrich the experience for prospective students, Western Governors University (WGU) partnered with InScribe and WGU Labs to launch a virtual

enrollment community that was integrated into the university's enrollment portal. The online community brings together applicants, WGU enrollment staff, and university alumni in a shared space where they can ask questions, find answers, and share personal experiences.

As part of the implementation, WGU Labs conducted an experiment on the extent to which the community impacted key enrollment metrics: specifically, matriculation rates and enrollment timelines. Additional feedback was collected by surveying WGU applicants and interviewing community moderators.

RESULTS AT A GLANCE



Applicants who *actively participated* in the community (by viewing posts within the platform or posting) were more than twice as likely as those who did not participate to matriculate at WGU.

80,000+

views of posts in the community (with some conversations receiving more than 4,000 views)

MOST POPULAR TOPICS:

transcripts
transfer credit
financial aid
WGU experience

KEY FINDINGS

The community hosted 3,545 participants over the course of five months and received high levels of engagement.

- There were **80,000+ total views** of posts in the community, with some conversations receiving more than 4,000 views. This illustrates the power of the community to efficiently disseminate information and answers to commonly asked questions.
- The community also provided insights into areas where applicants needed the most help (transcripts, transfer credits, financial aid) and what they were curious about (the WGU student experience), creating a strong feedback loop that can help improve the overall enrollment process over time.

While access to the community did not impact enrollment metrics or accelerate matriculation timelines, two key findings did emerge from the study:

- Applicants who actively participated in the community (by viewing posts within the platform or posting) were **more than twice as likely** as those who did not participate to matriculate at WGU.
- Applicants in the community also reported a **higher Net Promoter Score** corresponding to the enrollment experience.

Figure 1 illustrates the higher rates of matriculation for various subgroups within the applicant community. The “No Activity” category includes students in the treatment group who did not participate in the community, as well as all other applicants who were not invited to participate.

Although the experiment did not provide causal evidence for the community’s impact on enrollment metrics, the data suggest that students who actively participate in the community may be more serious about enrolling at WGU. To that end, the community could enhance WGU’s ability to identify and invest in applicants who are most likely to complete the enrollment process.

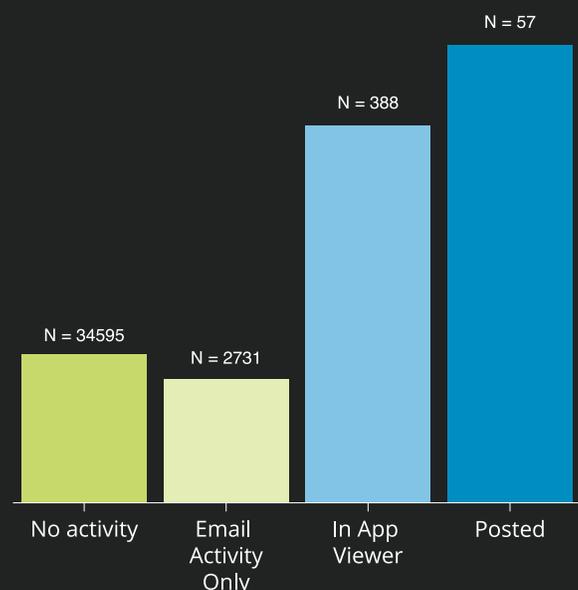
The community was supported by a small team of moderators, including two members of the WGU Chat Team and 17 alumni volunteers. Both groups fostered the community’s growth by providing timely, accurate answers to applicant questions and sharing helpful resources, from scholarship tips to inspirational tales of their own WGU journeys.

Alumni reported benefiting from increased engagement with students and each other. They also enjoyed using a platform without the “negativity” and “wild tangents” seen on social media sites. WGU’s sprawling, engaged alumni network offers a compelling resource for the enrollment team.

At an online university without traditional applicant offerings like campus tours and serendipitous in-person connections, a robust applicant community could forge a deeper connection between students and WGU.

The nascent community created by WGU and InScribe enhances the efforts of the enrollment team, offers a new opportunity for alumni to remain engaged with the university, and provides a seamless transition and solid footing for applicants as they make their enrollment decision and begin their unique journey as WGU students.

Figure 1: Matriculation Rates





+



The **Accelerator at WGU Labs** works with early-stage education technology startups. As an accelerator born out of Western Governors University (WGU) — the nation’s largest nonprofit, online university — its mission is to advance the academic, social, and career success of learners by lowering education costs, increasing learner access, and improving learner outcomes, all with a particular focus on those who are underserved and/or at-risk.

InScribe is a digital student support platform using a combination of community input and artificial intelligence which can be integrated into a school’s existing ecosystem. This platform aims to support student success by providing a single location spanning across the common support silos found in higher education, allowing on-demand connection and collaboration with instructors, mentors, and peers. InScribe is designed to increase student engagement and retention by 1) enabling students to build connections in the learning community, 2) helping students receive the support they need quickly and efficiently, 3) increasing satisfaction in the student’s educational experience.